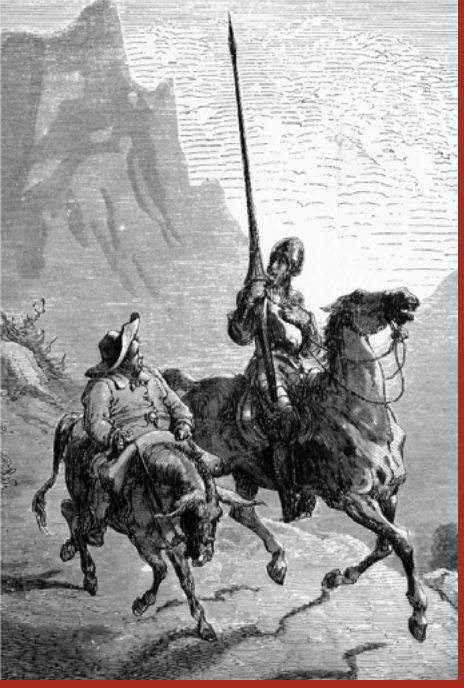

02

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CONTOS

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02

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Cover photo: Don Quixote de la Mancha and Sancho Panza, Gustave Doré, 1863

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The views expressed in CONSTRUCT are shared by the publication as a whole.

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CONSTRUCT 02

editor's note

Photograph: Helmut Newton, Italian Vogue, 1982

What do we, as products of the middle class, know about the reality beyond this city's borders? Not much. Maybe even close to nothing. But we do not need to draw comparisons to know that life in the city—especially this city—is not OK. Something terribly wrong is happening in this zoo as we speak.

Yes, life here is undeniably alluring. Your necessities are readily available: modern civilization's greatest achievement. So what is there to worry about? Of course you have to oppress, steal, insult others in front of your superiors, accumulate ugly rumors about your competitors or worst of all, you feel the constant urge to drain all feelings from your partner in order to be with your idol (who, of course, occupies the top tier of your social circle). But once again, what is there to worry about? Everyone does it anyway.

Opportunism—oh, there is no match for this grand mental construct. How could there possibly be one? Since the moment you began to understand the game of language, you have been educated to abide by its laws. Every institution you have come in contact with has showed and taught you how to be the perfect opportunist: part human, part serpent. And as exemplary products of the middle class, there is nothing left to do but to replicate the pattern.

In the end, our surroundings begin to suffocate us; as the air becomes heavier and heavier, we get stuck in the rain, the worst scenario. We are no longer able to respond to your behaviour that is nothing more than a bad copy of a corrupted blueprint with silence. Like you, we are also exemplary products of the middle class, and we will continue to whisper the truths of your worst doings. After all, a single whisper is more than enough to destroy a household, is it not?

“Since the moment you began to understand the game of language, you have been educated to abide by its laws. Every institution you have come in contact with has showed and taught you how to be the perfect opportunist: part human, part serpent.”

Poetry

Staging an Eternity of Chaos

The weight of heaven
resting on this restless city is
as light as
a feather
that has just fallen off the battered wing of
a weary angel—
Oh, that poor messenger of god.

I've lost count of all
the humans who have tried to shoot him—yes,
we have tried and tried to shoot you down!—
even if the ultimate rule is clear:

Never shoot the messenger.

God,
our indifferent master,
the aging puppeteer who has lost interest in
his toys.
Too soon, not soon enough.

And the angel,
tired of conveying god's
incurable boredom,
no longer sees the value of the message,
no longer fears the constant death threats.

So we—though abandoned,
tired, and
profoundly confused—continue
the show with
no strings attached,
no script,
no audience,
no god's ass to kiss.
While the angel,
equally
tired and confused,
finally abandons everything,
and joins his long-lost friend
in the fiery pit of doom.

The curtain falls.
The eternal rebellion
begins.

Untitled

"The revolution becomes a desert if it is always without victory… that it may not be too late for those who want to win, but not with the violence of the old, desperate weapons…"

— Pier Paolo Pasolini, Victory (1964)

I

Someone has taken our knives.
We go down like the sun.
Place of birth: unknown.

They have scratched away our slogans.
Year of birth: unknown.

We go down like hail and rain.
Religion: fuck it.

Next time they shoot us, we will refuse to die.

II

I do not really think of my friends as crows
screeching from the rooftops of Exarcheia, to
whatever's left of Jakarta,
I mean, do they even exist here? Crows?
How could I think of them that way, I,
a target, with a bag of plastic in my hand and
monthly bills pushing over my wallet,
right up through my anus (where is the lubricant?)
From the places where alcohol leaks
into Marx, and plague works inside Bakunin.

The streets are so narrow here, it is almost like
we are all asleep in the same bed, same slumps,
bedbugs, love, and I love my friends. I think
of them as electrical wires, strung from the rooftops of
Exarcheia all the way through the dodgy streets of Jakarta;
of Kobanî and Tolikara, the classes, the wars,
of where we awaken together, screeching teeth, choirs
of wires, dressed in black because history made
our Red so foul, it became so Pink and gay
talking only in code because
plain speech is fit only for ass-licking
or to serve any other capitalist rhetoric

I have not taken anything
Not that I should, or would
Sleeping pills? No, it makes my eyes twitch.
Xanax? No, it makes my balls itch.
The kids around here
they simply do not give a shit,
but it freaks out the parents nonetheless

Hell yes, I will think of my friends as crows, as screeches,
as electrical wires stretched from city to city, as tightening grips
around your throats, you capitalist pigs, your pale throats!

editors

the bastard sons
daughters
to be asian and one
these brainless deciders
decided they have won

continental identities
packaged, commodified
second class exports
to foreign lands
high on exotics
and fucking quixotic

you give them reason to look down on us
you've positioned them above us

and they all call each other
end their nights piss drunk
proud and satisfied
substitute of sex
no time for that

here they stand
we pride on our jewels
our valueless jewels
part of a club
and none of movements
parading their shoes
fancy our jewels!

a vision so short-sighted and
the printed page
a homogenous dumb forage
of all unafforded
returned in due time
end of month
and over again

over again

What do we, as products of the middle class, know about the reality beyond this city's borders? Not much. Maybe even close to nothing. But we do not need to draw comparisons to know that life in the city—especially this city—is not OK. Something terribly wrong is happening in this zoo as we speak.

Prose
+
Essay

Terulang Sendiri

Babak baru kehidupanku dimulai, ditandai dengan alarm berdering keras pukul 5 pagi. Dengan gestur serupa mayat hidup dan otak yang belum bekerja penuh, aku merangkak ke pinggir kasur untuk mematikannya. Tersadar, ini adalah hari yang penting. Waktu mandiku masih 2 jam lagi. Belum ada urgensi. Aku berpindah ke ruang tengah dan menyalakan televisi. Tak ada yang menarik, mungkin karena hari masih terlalu pagi. Di antara hipnotis statis saluran televisi dan heningnya pagi, aku termenung dan berpikir: "Apakah aku yang belum terbiasa oleh rutinitas atau rutinitaskah yang menolak untuk terbiasa olehku?"

Kemudian aku teringat akan kebutuhan pokok yang harus dipenuhi.

Setiap hari.
Seperti ini.

Setelah siap dengan segala perbekalan, aku memulai perjalanan.

"Kenapa semua orang bergerak serupa denganku? Apakah mereka harus memenuhi kebutuhan pokok juga?"

Pertanyaanku terjawab oleh betapa taktis dan beringasnya mereka di atas kuda besi. Sudut-sudut sempit ditembus, teritori pejalan kaki dibabat habis tanpa menyisakan ruang. Mereka tak peduli penghuninya lengang berjalan. Rambu tanda berhenti diabaikan.

Aku berada di kebun binatang manusia.

Di kiri-kanan banyak berdiri monumen kejayaan Indonesia baru yang dijaga ketat oleh pria-pria berbadan tegap. Aku saja segan melihatnya dari kejauhan. Mereka tampak sangat siaga, hasil pelatihan rutin mental dan fisik.

Gemuruh suara mesin, pekatnya asap knalpot dan gelombang panas dari aspal terpanggang kembali menarik perhatianku kepada para penghuni kebun binatang. Aku tersadar, perjalanan masih panjang.

Seperti ini.
Setiap hari.

Tentang Pelajaran

Hanya ada satu tempat yang bisa membuat dadaku sesak, perutku menggerutu dan otakku gugup; sekolah.

Apa pun tingkatnya, dasar, menengah atau akhir, tempat ini acapkali membuatku merasa aneh. Tentu kebahagiaan juga kutemui di tempat ini, khususnya mereka yang pernah mengisi hidupku, mengajariku tentang manusia dan berharganya pertemanan, memberiku cara membaur di kerumunan, bahkan mendorongku untuk bisa bertahan di berbagai situasi sosial.

Hal-hal tersebut menempatkan sekolah di posisi aneh dalam memoriku. Seperti taman penuh sampah yang butuh dikunjungi.

Bahasa sebagai medium tak akan cukup bila kuungkapkan rasaku pada sekolah, klise memang, namun ungkapan ini terasa paling dekat dari kebenaran yang aku rasakan. Aku hanya akan bercerita tentang memori-memori terkuatku, yang aku yakini tak banyak tergerus distorsi waktu.

Memoriku paling awal bersekolah adalah taman kanak-kanak tingkat dua, TK B, begitu ibuku menyebutnya. Di sini aku belajar bersikap skeptis, kini sudah tertanam dalam benakku untuk tak langsung percaya pada apa pun. Ya benar, hal apa pun. Sebabnya sederhana, seorang kenalan suatu hari pernah menawariku sepotong roti.

Baik benar dia, pikirku, padahal aku melihatnya sebagai seorang bully, dari bagaimana teman-temanku berperilaku di depannya dan bagaimana dia memperlakukan teman-temanku. Dengan badan yang dua kali lipat besarnya dariku, tentu konfrontasi fisik akan selalu dimenangkan olehnya. Maka ketika dia menawarkan roti itu dengan raut wajah ramah, dengan cepat aku memakan roti itu.

Anehnya, perutku berteriak saat jam istirahat. Aku yang tak tahu apa-apa pun mencoba menahannya, hingga akhirnya aku tak kuat lagi dan muntah. Guruku pun memanggil ibuku, menyuruhku untuk pulang saja, padahal aku ingat telah berjanji pada teman-temanku untuk berburu serangga di lapangan seberang setelah jam sekolah.

Sebelum pulang, aku memberanikan diri untuk mengkonfrontir sang pemberi roti. Dengan nada setengah tertawa, dia berkata roti yang dia berikan ternyata sudah basi karena memang berada dalam tasnya sejak beberapa hari yang lalu. Pada titik ini aku merasa kecewa, ternyata dia memang bully, seperti yang selama ini aku lihat.

Keesokannya, ketika aku pulih dan orangtuanya ditegur oleh guruku, aku bersembunyi dari kenalanku ini. Lagi pula, aku tak senekat itu untuk mengajaknya berkelahi. Di saat yang sama aku menemukan senjata lain untuk mempertahankan diri: lewat bisikan.

Teman-temanku bertanya mengapa kemarin aku pulang lebih dulu, sekaligus menagih janji bermain yang tak berhasil aku tepati. Tanpa berpikir dua kali aku menceritakan bagaimana tawaran roti itu membuat perutku perih. Aku sudah bersiap untuk dimaki karena ingkar janji.

Di luar dugaanku, ternyata kepolosanku membuat kenalanku si bully ini dikucilkan. Aku berasumsi mungkin teman-temanku juga enggan mengalami hal serupa. Kejahilan bully ini ternyata menjadi pelajaran berarti bagiku.

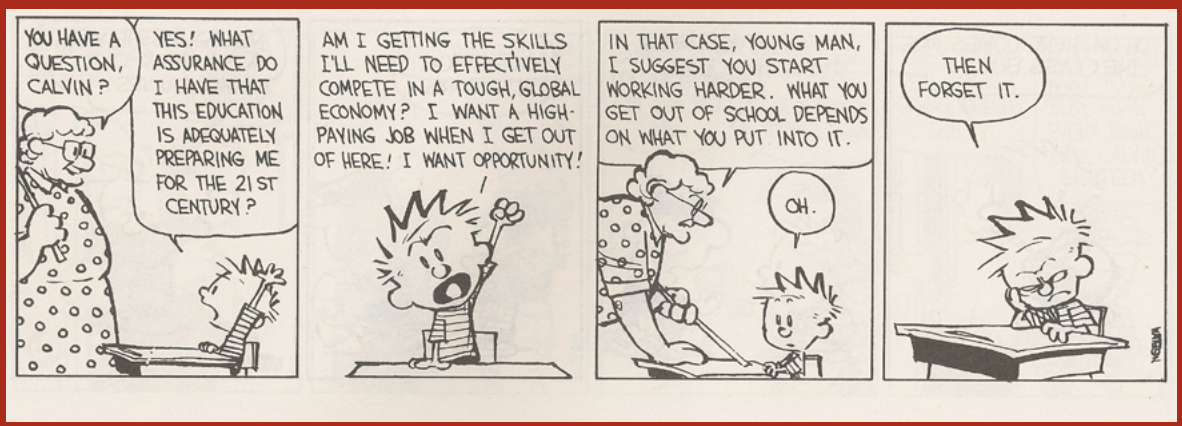
Aku berpikir bahwa argumen kuat dapat menjatuhkan represi kekuatan fisik sekuat apa pun. Aku berhasil melewati 12 tahun jenjang sekolah hanya bermodalkan kata-kata. Aku lebih beruntung dari teman-temanku yang pernah dimasukkan ke dalam tong sampah, dipukuli oleh para senior atau dikasari berlebihan ketika pertandingan olahraga. Mungkin secara tak sadar peristiwa ini mendorongku untuk menyeriusi buku dan bacaan apa pun.

Kini, di seperempat abad hidupku, aku sadar bahwa pelajaran ini masih relevan di lingkungan hidupku. Tapi tidak di luar sana. Kata-kata tampak tak berdaya. Dominasi kekuatan fisik tetap unggul.

Baru-baru ini, warga Kampung Pulo merasakan hal ini. Ketika kata-kata dan negosiasi tak lagi cukup, represi fisik jadi solusi masalah yang menimpa mereka. Tersebut juga warga Rembang, Lumajang, Papua dan Jatigede. Bagi warga di Pajagan, tempat Waduk Jatigede dibangun, mereka harus kehilangan tempat tinggal karena para penguasa memutuskan untuk menenggelamkan tempat tinggal mereka bersama sang waduk. Ini memang bukan represi fisik, tapi siapa yang butuh bogem dan pentungan kalau air bah bisa mengalahkan mereka?

Beberapa nama daerah yang baru kusebutkan merupakan sebagian kecil kasus represi fisik yang aku ketahui. Jika merunut sejarah panjang negara tempatku tinggal ini, maka tak ada habisnya mereka yang kuat secara fisik dan jumlah menghabisi mereka yang lemah.

Acapkali membaca buku dan berita tentang penindasan ini, aku merasa perutku kembali menggerutu. Aku mau tak mau merasa inferior dibandingkan mereka yang berani melawan penindas dengan cara apa pun. Ternyata mereka (baik yang telah gugur atau masih melawan) sudah mengajariku hal yang selama ini tak aku sadari: untuk bertahan hidup membutuhkan kemampuan bertahan diri yang tepat, melalui bisikan atau pukulan. Aku patut berterima kasih pada mereka, karena dua cara tersebut dapat mencegah suatu entitas menjadi terlalu dominan. Di lingkungan kelas menengahku yang aman dan minim penindasan ini, aku akhirnya mengutamakan cara pertama.



Cartoon: Bill Waterson, Calvin and Hobbes, date unknown.

Bonang P. Sirait's Drawing of Don Quixote

All of us, those who draw and sign our names, do it to make ends meet. Nothing else. And to make ends meet we do not hesitate in affirming that white is black and vice-versa. People are looking for the truth and we give them counterfeit money.

— Bonang P. Sirait, in an interview with People's Literature magazine (2006)

As part of the 350th anniversary celebration of Miguel de Cervantes's book The Ingenious Gentlemen Don Quixote of La Mancha, the 1955 drawing of Don Quixote by Pablo Picasso was featured in Les Lettres Françaises.[1] This Spanish novel simultaneously deals with issues such as realism, intertextuality, and representation in art and literature, making it one of the earliest highly influential, canonical modern works. This particular drawing is evidently different from the pieces that mark the iconic styles of Picasso with their bold, heavy and scribbly lines. To date, many reproductions of the sketch have been produced, and it is not hard for us to encounter this image on the book cover of some contemporary editions of Don Quixote.

Picasso's Don Quixote on the cover of Les Lettres Françaises
(18-24 August, 1955)

The original drawing is lost, and some believe that it is in the possession of a family in France. It was also rumored that since it was drawn in 1955, it has been kept in a basement vault at St. Denis Church. In 2010, some art critics in Georgia claimed to have discovered the original drawing commissioned by the French journal. This drawing is part of the private collection of a family in Tbilisi. It was a gift from a relative living abroad, and the family thought the drawing was only a vintage print of the iconic image. This claim of authenticity by the Georgian critics was also supported by Dali Lebanidze, from the G. Chubinashvili National Center of Art history Research and Fixation. After a careful examination of the picture, Lebanidze concluded that from the "placement of ink on the paper, the incredible energy of the artist's manner, the complete freedom of lines that reflects inner emotion of the artist—all indicated to the fact that it was the original. It is impossible to achieve such freedom, to repeat or copy such spontaneous character of the picture".[2]

Unlike how this image is usually presented in print with black ink on white paper, the Georgian version was in blue-green ink. According

Don Quixote (1955)
Pablo Picasso

to the report, the subtle, bluish ink tone with the added layers and complexity makes this version more emphatic, but no high resolution image of it has ever been released. Despite doubts, the possibility of this version being the original remains. The gray tone version in the August issue of Les Lettres Françaises could have been created by the blue-green ink, and no independent scientific or critical papers had been published to refute this claim—or at least, not until the untimely death of Indonesian artist-writer Bonang P. Sirait in early 2012, and how he might had been involved in the scam.

Although the news of his untimely death was not comparable to the high media profile arrest of Afriani Susanti (the main suspect of Tugu Tani Accident) in 2012, or attracted as much noise and attention as the Djakarta Warehouse Project, it has nonetheless shaken the art scene (for lack of a better word) in Indonesia. Upon his graduation from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Singapore in 1987, and after moving to China (his wife, Liu Guan, is a fellow artist residing in China), Bonang's practice could generally be termed as unstable and inconsistent. Apart from his artworks, which were loosely defined by him as 'Displaced Realism', his statements and writings had earned him the reputation of an enfant terrible—more amongst his peers than to the authorities. The notoriety of his views on art and aesthetics were considered 'regressive'. And for his strong criticisms of the individualistic, liberal and seemingly non-political aesthetics of his peers, he was once accused of 'writing like a Stalinist scribe' and even labeled as a 'Lenin-dogmatist'. To investigate his worldview in relation to his statements and art practice is beyond the writer's scope. The objective is to reflect on the controversy after the publication of his posthumous writings and the responses that followed, in defense of his confession.

Being an immigrant artist in China, what Bonang, or simply Bó (

伯)—which was what people called him in China (the name also means 'uncle')—has managed to not only invoke the condemnations of immigrant artists and intellectuals in China, but also divided the liberal (if not plural) art world of China—somewhat an inverted reflection of the political reality.

In his posthumous publication Satu Gelas Lagi (One More Shot, 2013) there was an entry titled Dari Selatan ke Utara, Pulang ke Selatan (From South to North I Remained South). In this piece, he was reflecting on the year spent in the economically vibrant Southern city of Guangzhou after his studies in Singapore, instead of returning to his hometown Tomok in the outskirts of Medan—an arid, underdeveloped area of North Sumatra. He mentioned how he had 'learned' more during his stint as a copy artist, copying European masterpieces, at Dafen, a town outside of Shenzhen, now known for being one of the largest producers of copied oil paintings in the world. He recounted his encounter with a Georgian man who bought a drawing from him:

> "He told me he was from Georgia. I told him there are two persons who fascinate me from your land. I told him the two names. Of course he knows Stalin, but as for Marr, the Soviet-Georgian linguist denounced indirectly by Stalin, he has not heard of him. I thought about how I wish I could read certain texts in Russian, such as Marr's "On the Origins of Language"—if I were to have his command of the language. He told me he is Georgian not Russian. I classified him as a separatist, a victim of neo-liberal ideology. The line is drawn. I know what price he has to pay for the Picasso drawing. I will rip him off good. I told him Stalin prefers Thackeray than Cervantes. The conversation drifted to how copying involves, apart from the drawing techniques, not only the process of imitating characteristics and styles of the work or artist but also time. The state of the work, how it ages with time, yellowed paper and cracked painted surface, an aged frame, these are missing in the work of the artisans in Dafen. It should be made like a prop for a film or theatre. When I spoke to the Shanghainese painter Chen Chudian in Singapore, we discussed this as well. Using warmed soap as fat, his experience and resourcefulness as a prop master then. If art has abandoned realism it could be located elsewhere in other practices, in forgeries, fakeries and hoaxes. I used Chinese ink for this, and of course, not on rice paper. I only accept cash, I told him."

Apart from those who used it as a piece of evidence to attack the artist's moral integrity, or to add on to the questions surrounding the Georgian 'original', I would like to highlight a few responses made by some notable figures of the art and literary scenes in China who see otherwise. Indeed, it is quite strange how Indonesian artists and writers refused to comment on the whole affair surrounding Bonang's controversial method in art. Many of them quickly dismissed Bonang's reputation as a mere copycat artist and a sly opportunist with no serious talent whatsoever. This, the writer insists, could not be further from the truth.

In his essay on Bonang's Displaced Realism, Chinese writer-painter Chen Danqing (陈丹青) commented on how Bonang had dispersed the practice of Realism, and defended his act of 'plagiarism' in his paintings and writings within the lineage of readymade and found objects to the point where his days as a copy artist could be contextualized as a crucial part to the formation of his whole practice. Using Bonang as an example to support his justification of imitation as a fundamental artistic gesture, he further argued within the discourse of Chinese aesthetics, "What about our peculiar tradition of imitation? The building block of calligraphy that requires us to copy repeatedly. We learn to write in school thousands of characters not only to memorize but also to perfect the strokes. China's tradition of copying old works to preserve them but also to learn traditional techniques goes back centuries and makes it difficult even for leading scholars to determine the authenticity of a piece". Chen also saw similarities to Bonang in Project Imitation by Hao Zhenhan, the self-proclaimed Non-Artist and Anti-Designer based in London, who questioned why the act of copying is condemned, and if the art practice in the West did not require some form of imitation.

Don Quixote (2001)
Bonang P. Sirait

However, it is in the recent article by Chinese writer Wang Shuo (王朔) that we see how the moral platitudes against Bonang's extreme counterfeiting are directly addressed from his own point of view. Known for his hooligan literature, Wang was rather sentimental, yet unable to cast away his satirical tone of voice, as he recalls a conversation he had with Bonang a few months before he passed away:

> I remembered the last conversation I had with Bó. "I wasted my time today listening to that sha bi (idiot, 傻屄) telling me how he could tell if it is an original Li Keran or Qi Baishi. I do not give a shit! But since he will be funding the film for you, I just kept quiet. The ability to make such distinction smells too much of the stench found in all the petit-bourgeois activities," Bó paused, lit another cigarette and continued, "Such questions about authorship bore me". His eyebrows started to sweat. This kind of talk irritates him. "I do not see fakes as representation of the real and the real as the authentic as they are all presentation in itself. Of course in reality the price of 'original' would translate a remarkable difference to my bank account if I were to sell it. The fake nose of Michael Jackson falls too often. Yet he would not be the real Michael Jackson without that fake nose," he then concluded. The tea was served. Bó paid for it. I wondered if he were using counterfeits when he handed the money to the waiter. And now, I wish his death, the death certificate his family received, was a counterfeit too.[3]

Valorization of such gestures, which question originality, authorship and representation, is not uncommon in the West. Even in Indonesia, the culture of piracy (copying, imitating, etc.) has gained notoriety around the world. That being said, this kind of phenomenon is not entirely alien to the practice of art, especially in the Southeast Asian region. The death of the 'aura' in the work of art, as Walter Benjamin predicted in the early 20th century, has undergone rapid transformation. Art no longer produces an 'aura' because it increasingly resembles economic production. The aura has disappeared in the modern age because art has become reproducible. Think of the way a work of classic literature can be bought cheaply in paperback, music can be downloaded or ripped and then burned on CDs, or a painting bought as a poster or a gift card. A reproduced artwork is never fully present. If there is no original, it is never fully present anywhere. Authenticity cannot be reproduced, and disappears when everything is reproduced. Benjamin thinks that even the original is depreciated, because it is no longer unique. It lacks in one element: its presence in time and space.[4] Along with their authenticity, objects also lose their authority. The masses contribute to the loss of aura by seeking constantly to bring things closer. They create reproducible realities and hence destroy uniqueness. This clearly shows that the concept of identity, originality, authenticity, or authorship is very fragile and easily modifiable.

Similar but not exactly identical to Bonang's entire stance, Pierre Menard, the fictional Author of Don Quixote by Jorge Luis Borges was a pivotal piece of fiction that has expanded the art of appropriation. In the guise of an academic essay, Borges uses the fictitious figure of a French poet–literary critic Pierre Menard to expound his ideas about reading, writing, quoting and imitating. In the story, the dead French writer left behind an unfinished masterpiece that consist chapters of Don Quixote. However, this version by Menard is neither a copy nor a 20th century version of the 17th century novel. Rather, it was an attempt "to produce a number of pages which coincided word for word, and line for line those of Miguel Cervantes". For Borges, it is the latter version that surpasses the former:

> Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say, but ambiguity is richness.)
>
> It is a revelation to compare Menard's Don Quixote with Cervantes'. The latter for example, wrote (part one, chapter nine):
>
> "... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor."
>
> Written in the 17th century, written by the "lay genius" Cervantes, this enumeration is a mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand writes:
>
> "... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor."[5]

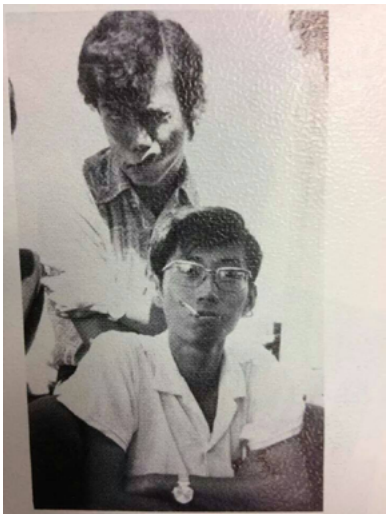
Borges repeatedly compared the form, content and context of the two versions throughout the text, and justified the value of Menard's. For Borges, Menard's Quixote is radically different to Cervantes', even if they appear identical: how could an identical paragraph mean the same in 1605 as in the 1930s? Literature might be the endless repetition of the same topics but these are never received unchangeably. Many authors and artists were inspired and influenced by different aspects of this venerated text, apart maybe for Borinsky—the Argentine writer and literary critic—who would argue that Menard is somehow being a little too naïve in treating Cervantes' text, ignorant of Quixote as a translated text and of Cervantes' parody.[6] But it is also quite possible to argue that she had not understood the difference between Cervantes' conception of spontaneity as reproduction and Menard's conception of the intellectual understanding of necessity as determinism.

Countless critical essays and books were written about this comical, short text of 'infinite richness' despite Borges' problematic political position, as a Latin American pretending to be European, and to die

and be buried in Geneva.

Let us now consider a similar case involving the Argentine writer Pablo Katchadjian, who was accused of 'plagiarizing' Borges' work. In 2009, he decided to remix one of Borges' most renowned short stories The Aleph, by keeping the original text but adding a considerable amount of his own writing (adding 5,600 words to the original 4,000).[7] The result of his playful effort was the short experimental book called El Aleph engordado (The Fattened Aleph). And for this experimentation, Katchadjian must suffer the consequences, one of which involves an ongoing plagiarism lawsuit first initiated in 2011 by Borges' widow María Kodama, also a fervent guardian of his literary estate. It seems very unlikely that Katchadjian will actually end up in prison, but the implications of taking writers to court over creative acts are chilling. Those familiar with Borges' oeuvre will recognize in the story of Pierre Menard the return of a number of his intellectual concerns: meta-literature, an obsession with reproducibility and the classics. And forgery—Borges is, after all, also famous for his use and abuse of fake quotes and forged literary references.

But when this is applied to the case of Bonang or all the nameless artisans at Dafen art factories, the discussions often degenerate to spontaneous condemnation, the lack of creativity, and relate it to issues about counterfeit culture as being detrimental to China, or in this case, Indonesia, than to admit or see culture as inherently a form of counterfeit identity. Here, one should be extra careful, and avoid redirecting the question back towards a petit-bourgeois qualitative-quantitative assessment of authenticity, for by doing so, one would miss the whole point of the exercises carried out by either Borges to Cervantes; Katchadjian, to Borges; or Bonang to Picasso. In his statement for his second solo exhibition, Bonang made a concise summary of this position, "Everything becomes real when it draws and imitates the process of a supreme lie. Every drawing begins as the desire for another drawing, as the drive to copy, to stead, and to contradict, as envy and as overconfidence".



Bonang P. Sirait (above) and Cumbu Sigil (below), c. 1978

Notes

1) A French literary publication, founded in 1941 by writers Jacques Decour and Jean Paulhan. Originally a clandestine magazine of the French Resistance in German-occupied territory, ceased publication in 1960s, and revived in the 1990s as a literary supplement of the French daily leftist newspaper L'Humanité.

2) Dali, Lebanidze, "Picasso's "Don Quixote" Found in Georgia" , Georgia Today (July 6, 2010)

3) Wang Shuo, "The Last Conversation", He Liu (The Flow), Tianjin People's Publishing House, 2013, p. 113

4) Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, Schocken, 2007, p. 220

5) Borges, Jorge Luis, "Pierre Menard, the Author of Quixote", Labyrinths, New Directions Publishing, 1962, p. 43

6) Mike Gane, Ideological Representation and Power in Social Relations, Routledge, 2014, p. 33

7) Thomas Jones, "Whose Borges?", London Review of Books, accessed from http://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2015/07/02/thomas-jones/whose-borges/, 28 September 2015, 3:25 PM